

# ***CPS REFORM WATCH***

***CPS Reform Watch describes the progress made in implementing the reforms outlined in Governor Janet Napolitano's Action Plan for Reform of Arizona's Child Protection System and included in legislation passed during the 2003 special session. This monthly bulletin also is available on the Department of Economic Security's website at [www.de.state.az.us](http://www.de.state.az.us) and on the Governor's website at [www.governor.state.az.us](http://www.governor.state.az.us).***

**May 2004**

***Foster Care Appreciation Month Activities Highlight the Needs for Homes!*** – Events to recognize the invaluable contributions of foster parents and case managers to the protection of abused and neglected children were held throughout Arizona last month. In Maricopa County, more than 300 people gathered at Wesley Bolin Plaza on May 19 to tie almost 8,400 ribbons on the trees to symbolize the children in out of home care in Arizona. The following morning, an additional 120 people gathered to hear Governor Janet Napolitano, DES Director David Berns, foster parent association president Kris Jacober, caseworker Cheryl Moore and former foster child Eric Izckowski talk about the need for foster homes.

Eric's testimony was very powerful. Some excerpts include:

- The school changes were the worst – having to get used to a new school and trying to make friends, only to have to leave again after a few months. Between the homes changing, the caseworkers changing, and the teachers changing, I kinda got the feeling that nobody really cared enough about me to stick around in my life.
- Unless you've been through it, I don't think you could understand what it's like to not have a home. Not to have a family. And not to have many of the things and opportunities most kids take for granted.
- I never had a best friend – someone you go to school with and play with and grow up with – until the fifth grade ... I could never invite anyone to my house – because I didn't have a "my house" ... I had some of my childhood shots twice because records got lost as I went from place to place ... I went to (three different schools) all within a one month's time.
- I think my case is a great example of why CPS needs to be able to recruit and keep good case managers and why we need to encourage and train foster parents – in order that other abused and neglected children will have more stability in their lives – and more hope.

The significant media attention from these events had an immediate impact: in Maricopa County, 28 percent of the calls from potential foster parents in the month of May came during the three days surrounding the Blue Ribbon event. Some foster parent recruiters reported receiving nine times the number of calls from potential foster parents in May than in previous months! The event was spearheaded by the Arizona Association for Foster and Adoptive Parents with the help of the KIDS Consortium, the Department of Economic Security (Child Protective Services and Division of Developmental Disabilities), Court Appointed Special Advocates, and the local chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. The campaign steering committee will meet this month to discuss how to sustain that success throughout the year by coordinating with other community efforts to increase the number of foster homes in Arizona.

**Foster Care Review Board** – On May 22, DES Director David Berns, Deputy Director Mary Lou Hanley and Tracy Wareing, policy advisor to Governor Janet Napolitano, presented a progress report on the implementation of CPS reform to participants in the statewide Foster Care Review Board Conference. The Foster Care Review Board advises the juvenile court on progress toward achieving a permanent home for a child or children involved in a dependency action and in an out-of-home placement. The well-being of these children is the highest concern to board members. There is at least one Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) in each county and several boards in the more populated counties. There are five volunteer members on each board. They are appointed by the court and have an interest and concern for children. These volunteers represent the various racial, ethnic, social and economic groups of the county in which they serve.

Currently, the Foster Care Review Board looks at nine major aspects of each case, including: whether reasonable efforts were made to prevent a child's removal; whether it is necessary to continue an out-of-home placement; whether the placement is safe, appropriate and the least restrictive; whether there is an appropriate case plan that outlines tasks for each participant in the case; whether each case participant is following the tasks outlined in the case plan; whether progress is being made toward removing the causes necessitating the out-of-home placement; whether there is established a realistic target date for completion of the permanency goal; whether a judicial determination needs to be made that reasonable efforts are being made by the agency to implement the permanency plan; and, whether the children's education is being implemented successfully.

At the May conference, a draft proposal to implement a 10<sup>th</sup> area in that review process was presented. This area will address whether there are significant service gaps or systemic problems in a case. To do this, FCRB volunteers would review more than 20 aspects of the case. The intent of this finding is to assist the Division in identifying service areas that need to be strengthened. The proposal was accepted by the statewide FCRB, which will now begin to look at how to share this information with its volunteers and implement the new finding. CPS was asked to provide comments and input on the proposal and those comments will continue to be forwarded to the FCRB as the proposal is finalized and implementation is developed.

**The Lodestar Family Connections Center** - On May 12, Governor Napolitano helped launch the Lodestar Family Connections Center. This center, a public-private partnership, is dedicated to assisting with the creation and preservation of adoptive, foster, kinship and guardianship families. Its mission is to raise awareness of the need for families and to support those families that are caring for Arizona's children. A centralized location is now available to families just beginning to inquire about foster care and adoption as well as those looking for post-placement support services. Created with input from hundreds of adoptive and foster families, the Center provides a place for families to gain access to information and community professionals who can help them build happy, healthy families. Any parent - whether it be a family just starting to think about fostering or adopting, a family that has been fostering for many years, grandparents raising grandchildren, or an adoptive family needing additional training or support - can use the center. All of the Center's activities are geared toward families parenting children other than birth children. They include, but are not limited to, topics such as discipline, attachment and bonding issues, brain development, legal issues around kinship care, and what to look for in a behavioral consultant or other behavioral diagnosis information. The Division is very excited about the opening of the center and is working with center staff on ways to support their efforts. The Family Connections Center is centrally located at 2320 North 20<sup>th</sup> Street, just south of Phoenix Children's Hospital. It is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information please contact Barb Trella at 602-254-2275 ext. 270.

***Risk Assessment Tool Fully Implemented*** – Staff training has been completed and the Division's new professional risk assessment tool is in use statewide. Together with the safety assessment tool instituted last year, this helps case managers make decisions about the child's immediate and long-term safety based upon the child's needs and the family's strengths. The risk assessment was developed using best practices and technical assistance from the National Resource Centers for Child Maltreatment, Foster Care & Permanency Planning, and Family-Centered Practice.

***Recruitment of Additional CPS Staff and Stipends*** – DES staff have been aggressively recruiting additional case managers. Between January and May, 158 case managers were hired. Sixty-two (62) of these positions were to fill vacancies; 96 of these were new positions funded by HB 2024. This number outperforms the target hiring plan established during the special session. The Division plans to hire the remaining 8 case managers in June, which will achieve the goal of 104 additional case managers by the end of the fiscal year.

In April, testing for the bilingual stipend, a verbal fluency exam administered by an independent contractor, was implemented. By the end of May, 163 CPS employees completed the entire process and are now receiving a bilingual stipend.

***Jury Trials for Severance Hearings*** – There were no jury trials held in May in severance cases. Since February, there have been a total of ten jury trials in severance cases. In nine of the ten cases, the juries granted a verdict in favor of terminating parental rights. This action frees the children for adoption to safe, permanent homes. In cases where verdicts do not favor severing parental rights, the department will continue to work with the family with the goal of returning the child to the home when it is safe to do so. The child is not eligible to be adopted or placed in a permanent home unless additional grounds for severance arise and/or until further efforts to reunify the family fail and severance is eventually granted. There are 23 cases pending statewide in which parents have requested jury trials for severance hearings.

***Implementation of the recommendations in the Governor's Action Plan, legislative changes that occurred during the 2003 Special Session, and other efforts to improve the state Child Protective Services system are coordinated through a statewide network of action teams. These teams include representatives of the Division of Children Youth and Families, as well as Department of Economic Security staff from services such as Family Assistance, Employment Services and Developmental Disabilities. Most importantly, these teams include dozens of neighborhood leaders and community-based organizations working in partnership with state officials to keep kids safe.***